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AUTHOR Gray, Brian; Cazden, Courtney B.
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ABSTRACT

This paper is about a teaching program that was developed at a school in Alice Springs, a small town in Australia that has influenced teaching programs for Aboriginal children in that country. At Traeger Park school, the Aboriginal children speak English, although the speech of many children is characterized as Aboriginal English dialect. The school teaches in English and seeks to achieve mainstream curriculum goals, an orientation supported by the parents. The effect of Cazden's concept of concentrated language encounters on the development of the teaching program at Traeger Park is described in detail. By employing a social construction approach to classroom discourse that concentrated on the scaffolding of common knowledge, a learning environment was created in which different discourse agendas on the part of the children and the teacher could come together in a way that still allowed the cultural goals for school learning to be achieved. (Contains 17 references.) (JP)

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Concentrated Language Encounters: The International Biography of a Curriculum Concept*

Brian Gray
University of Canberra (Australia)

Courtney B. Cazden
Harvard Graduate School of Education

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Introduction

Courtney B. Cazden

When American anthropologist and linguist, Dell Hymes (1966), first spoke programmatically about the concept of communicative competence, concern was more about the needs of English-speaking poor and minority group children, and less than today about the language-learning needs of immigrant children and adults who speak a language other than English. But for both groups, the idea of communicative competence enlarged our attention and our educational responsibilities beyond teaching grammar to teaching what to say or write, when, to whom, and how. These extra-grammatical aspects of competence are now sometimes separated out under the more specialized label of sociolinguistic competence. But Hymes's original term was intended to include them all.

At the same time, in the middle and late 1960s, a British sociologist, Basil Bernstein, was conducting research on the communicative competence (although he did not use that term) of

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* This article is based on a joint plenary presentation by Gray and Cazden at TESOL '92. They spoke from separate experiences --Cazden introducing and concluding, and Gray reporting in the middle. That separateness and that order have been retained here. Gray's participation was partially supported by a grant from the Spencer Foundation to Cazden.

children and adolescents in Britain. Bernstein's (1971) theory of language use was closely tied to a theory of social structure. For Bernstein, different patterns of language forms and functions follow from differences in social relationships, and the roles that people take, or are given, within them.

Bernstein's sociology of language became important for the concept of concentrated language encounters through two paths that connect from Britain to Australia and Brian Gray. One path is through Michael Halliday, an originally British linguist who moved to Australia in 1976. When Halliday was developing what has come to be called systemic functional linguistics, he needed a social theory to fit with his theory of language, and he adopted that social theory from Bernstein.

Hallidayan linguistics is now influential in language education in Australia, both mother tongue and ESL. Two concepts are especially important in Gray's work:

> The idea of <u>text</u> as any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, monologue or dialogue, that forms a unified whole; and
>
> The related idea of <u>genre</u>, as particular kinds of text defined primarily by function, such as recounts of personal experience, instructions for a game, reports of factual information. (See Christie, 1991, for discussion of both.)

The second path runs through the United States and through me. Part of Bernstein's research project was an experimental

language education program in a very poor district in East London (Gahagan & Gahagan, 1970). If you believe, as Bernstein and his colleagues did, that language use is closely tied to the context of situation, and to the speakers' or writers' roles within them, then curriculum design becomes a task of creating situations that put learners in new relationships, and give them both the content knowledge of what to talk and write about, and the language knowledge of how to say or write it. So, in the experimental program, frequent use was made of role-playing in order to create such situations within the classroom.

In two papers in the early 1970's, one (Cazden & Bartlett, 1973) a book review of the Bernsteinian language program and the other (Cazden, 1977) a chapter in a book that found its way to Australia, I coined a label for these classroom language situations, "concentrated language encounters", to differentiate them from the "contrived" pattern drills and fill-in-the-blank lessons and tests. Brian Gray developed this seed of an idea into a curriculum for Aboriginal children.

The Development of the Program in Alice Springs

Brian Gray

This paper is about a teaching program that was developed at a school in Alice Springs, a small town (pop. 25,000) in the very heart of Australia. The program has had considerable influence on teaching programs for Aboriginal children in Australia.

Traeger Park is an urban school in the sense that it is situated close to the center of the town. It is attended, however, by children from a wide range of backgrounds. In 1980 approximately 75% of the children attending the school were Aboriginal. These children came mostly from a low socio-economic area called "The Gap" and from "fringe camps" scattered around the edges of the town.

The Aboriginal children speak English, although the speech of many of them is commonly characterised as Aboriginal English dialect. Many of the children also have considerable fluency in one or more of four local Aboriginal languages. The school teaches in English and seeks to achieve mainstream curriculum goals. The parents support this orientation. A bilingual program is an option for the parents and is available at an Aboriginal community controlled school in Alice Springs.

Encountering the concept

In 1979, when I first commenced work at the school there was little information available which provided what I considered to be useful insights into the kinds of educational problems we were encountering in the classroom. However, one paper acted as a

catalyst for determining the direction we eventually took. It was written by Courtney Cazden (1977) and was called, "Concentrated versus contrived encounters: suggestions for language assessment in early childhood education". The major focus of this paper was on testing. However, buried within this focus on testing there was an obvious subtext which allowed the concept to be expanded way beyond the narrow realm of assessment into teaching and programming itself. The subtext emerges in quotes like the following,

> "They [concentrated encounters] are condensed forms of familiar interaction experiences. They represent our best examples of teaching encounters and are as close as possible to them in setting, participants and topic. But they are focused by teacher direction for assessment purposes, and involved a smaller than usual group of children so that the participation of each child is maximised." (Cazden, 1977, p. 52)

Another important feature of the paper was an emphasis on the need to consider development of teacher/child interaction as an important goal for language development. Cazden states,

> "I have argued for assessing process as well as product in early childhood education. By 'process' I mean the actual behaviour of teachers and children during the educational experience" (Cazden, 1977, pp. 44-5, emphasis added)

In drawing attention to the importance of interaction dynamics as curriculum goal, Cazden seemed to be exploring the same kind of issues in language development that we were trying to deal with. We were coming more and more to the position that good language programs for our children should be based not so much on extensive catalogues of what children know or do not know about "language". Rather, they depend far more on the teacher providing for the children a strong and flexible context from

which they can come to understand,

1. How language is employed to structure and organise what counts as knowledge in schools, and
2. How language is employed to negotiate learning in schools.

Adopting this perspective required a reframing of the educational problem away from concern with individual difference towards the realisation that the educational context provided no effective common ground around which school learning could be negotiated. To summarise in a somewhat cryptic manner, the central issue for language teaching was not that there were differences. Rather, there was no commonality.

When we observed and reflected on learning interactions in our classrooms, we found that breakdowns in communication were extremely frequent. We also began to realise that more was involved in the equation than a simple misunderstanding of Aboriginal learning styles. It is obviously important to understand how communication is conducted in Aboriginal culture. However, if we are to give Aboriginal children access to schooling in the majority culture, we need to give them access to an understanding of how we ourselves expect successful learning communication to be structured within the culture of schooling.

Unfortunately, this is quite a difficult achievement. Not only are the principles and expectations for learning negotiation unclear to the children, they are rarely explicitly understood by the teacher who is employing them. This is a major reason why teachers find it so difficult to understand why Aboriginal children cannot learn in their classrooms.

Because cultural knowledge is held in this way, a nasty paradox is created. It is the people in the out group who are most aware of the fact that there is a monstrous gap between what they are asked to do and the actual level of information that is made available to them. This paradox is frequently reflected in comments from Aboriginal people who attribute the failure of their children to the existence of a "secret English" in schools to which Aboriginal children are not given access. Most Australian teachers have no idea what they are talking about.

The situation in the classrooms: Difficulties with "language"

In order to elaborate and explain how we came to interpret this concept, I will need to describe in more detail the teaching context we faced at the time. When we watched attempts to negotiate learning with Aboriginal children, interactions frequently ended up with children refusing to respond to teachers especially when they attempted to use questions to extend learning discourse. However, complete refusal while unnervingly frequent in our classrooms, represented only the most obvious manifestation of a far more pervasive problem. Often the Aboriginal child will continue on, doing the best that they can to negotiate the interaction. These situations can often show us more clearly the nature of the language problem from the perspective of the child. About the same time I was looking at the language problem in the school, Richard Walker (1981) was carrying out a related project that involved recording the language interaction of a number of children during randomly

selected periods in the school day. The following transcript is taken from Walker's data.

The interaction takes place in the Transition (Kindergarten or first year, age 5 yrs) classroom, shortly after the start of morning class, between Raylene (R) and a teaching assistant (TA). Raylene's first language is Walpri which she speaks fluently. At the time of this recording she was living in a fringe camp on the edge of Alice Springs. Raylene is engaged in a maths activity and is pegging some coloured pegs onto a piece of string stretched along the side wall of the room. The purpose of the activity is to make repeated patterns with the pegs.

The interaction begins after Raylene has finished the task. She calls for the teacher who doesn't respond. This opens the way for a teaching assistant to then talk to Raylene about the activity in which she is engaged. The teaching assistant is an experienced fully qualified infants teacher. However, she encounters a somewhat unsettling difficulty. She finds herself asking Raylene a series of questions that don't ever seem to fully connect, and eventually the topic changes away from her originally intended educational discussion to a more trivial one which focuses on difficulties Raylene has with keeping the pegs on the line.

R: Hey look... look here Mrs Edwards...Mrs Edwards

(Wants to get attention of teacher to show her what she has done.)

TA: What have you done?

(T doesn't respond, so TA comes over to see what Raylene has

done.)

R: Colours... all o' dem

(Raylene has grouped each set of similar colour pegs together along the line.)

The teaching assistant is attempting to pursue an educational agenda. She is well aware of the link between patterns and mathematics. In order to elicit discussion about patterns she asks, "What have you done?" Raylene does not respond with explicit discussion about patterns. Rather she says, "Colours... all o' dem."

For her part Raylene is clearly concerned with the colours. She has grasped the basic purpose of the task. The adult, however, attempts lead Raylene to express the relationships in a way that is more appropriate to the language of mathematics. From the teaching assistant's perspective, Raylene does not really display enough verbally for her to be completely sure of any concepts Raylene might be exploring. So the teaching assistant persists and restructures her question to, "How did you put them up?" to which Raylene again responds, "All o' them, all o' them."

TA: How did you put them up?

R: All o' them, all o' them

TA: You put all of them up?

R: Yeah

Raylene does not seem to have perceived the question as one which seeks to make her reflect on the purpose of the task. Raylene seems to be saying, "Didn't you hear what I said the first time?" The teaching assistant takes the hint and responds to this insistence with, "You put all of them up?" to which Raylene concurs.

The teaching agenda has not been forgotten, however, and the teaching assistant restructures another question to push discussion towards patterns, "How did you put all the colours Raylene?" Raylene again doesn't supply the required explicit statement about patterns. Instead she points to the different colour groups, "This, this, this, this, this, this,...etc."

TA: How did you put all the colours Raylene?

R: This, this, this, this, this,...etc.

(When she says "This, this, this," she is pointing to each group of colours.)

TA: Yeah, you didn't mix them up, did you?

R: (Doesn't respond)

Finally the teaching assistant attempts to reframe Raylene's response more explicitly for her, "Yeah, you didn't mix them up, did you?" Raylene doesn't reply. Perhaps she is beginning to ask herself, "Where is this conversation going?"

The teaching assistant hasn't given up. She tries once again to develop explicit discussion about the patterns, "Was that very hard to do?" The teaching assistant is referring to

her previous attempt to refocus on the relationship between the colours. "You didn't mix them up, did you?" Raylene does not pick up this focus.

TA: Was that very hard to do?

R: They're almost fall down

TA: Fall down do they?

R: These...This one...These stupid thing fall down

TA: These yellow ones?

R: Yeah

TA: They keep falling down?

R: Yeah

TA: What about this one?

Is that nearly falling down, that purple one?

R: Yeah

(Raylene adjusts the purple peg when the TA asks about it.)

TA: Did it take you a long time?

We'll see if Mrs. Edwards's ready to look at it.

R: Miss Edwards...Miss Edwards...Miss Edwards...

(Raylene calls out to the teacher who is busy with the other children. She goes off on her own when the teacher doesn't respond.)

Fortunately for Raylene, the question provides an ambiguous opening and she responds in a way that the teaching assistant has not anticipated, "They're almost fall down." The teaching assistant decides to go with this change of focus, "Fall down do

they?" Discussion about repeated patterns and related mathematics concepts such as classifying and sorting is abandoned.

What is happening here? The teaching assistant and Raylene seem to have an easy relaxed rapport and Raylene seems quite willing to talk. What then is Raylene's "language problem"? Raylene's major "problem" appears to lie in the process of interaction itself. It seems clear that there is a language game being played here. One to which Raylene does not seem to be able to achieve access. In this instance, the "game" is quite subtle. However, it is not always so. In fact, if the teaching assistant had not finally abandoned her agenda about patterns when she did, it is likely Raylene would have very shortly taken refuge in silence.

At the beginning of our work at Traeger Park, concern with language function was starting to appear in curriculum documents along with taxonomies such as the following:

DESCRIBING: Recognising features and characteristics
EXPLAINING: Specifying causes, reasons and meaning of occurrences
REQUESTING: Asking for or about something
RETELLING: Recalling in sequence
COMPOSING: Formulating, organizing and presenting ideas
INFORMING: Related facts in an ordered fashion
CONVERSING &
DISCUSSING: Talking about something
REVIEWING: Recalling, re-examining, re-considering and appraising
SOCIALISING: Using the language and conventions appropriate to particular social situations
TRANSACTING: Using standard procedures when seeking and giving information, and when obtaining goods.
(Queensland Education Department, 1982)

However, functional approaches of this kind still assume the existence of a high degree of common purpose between participants in the interaction. Typically, they assume that children develop

the ability "to explain," for example, by responding to requests for explanations as interaction progresses.

If we take into consideration the difficulties the Aboriginal child was having in the previous transcript, it is hard to see how moving from form emphasis to function emphasis in this manner is going to offer any improvement. In fact, this kind of probing for extension was frequently a significant factor in creating communication breakdown. The central problem remains. Where do the children learn the purpose of "explaining"? What are the particular cultural expectations and interpretations teachers place on "explaining?" When and how do these things fit correctly into the flow of discourse that constitutes learning interaction? The problem is not that Aboriginal children cannot ask and answer questions. They can and often do so. However, it's just that they ask them in different ways and to achieve different cultural purposes than the school requires or allows. For example, they will ask and answer questions about friends and relatives. They will ask about what something is and where it is, but they don't respond well to questions that seek displays of knowledge in the manner that is fundamental to most classroom discourse. The central problem for Aboriginal children is coming to understand why people want them to use language in certain kinds of ways to achieve communication purposes that are largely hidden from them.

For similar reasons I would argue that simply encouraging children to talk more is not enough to really help Aboriginal children to learn effectively in mainstream schools. The

transcript of interaction with Raylene demonstrates that Raylene is quite outgoing and prepared to talk easily and freely with the adult who is seeking to help her in the classroom. However, Raylene never seems to quite catch onto exactly what the teacher helper is trying to draw out of her.

The caveat is this: At the same time as we encourage Aboriginal children to talk more, we need to find a way of making explicit what the school considers it is valuable for them to talk about. Similarly, Raylene needs to learn that the questions she is being asked are seeking to lead her to reflect on the commonly held education goal for the task of making pattern sequences. They are not just seeking information about her personal experience with the pegs.

Such understandings are not simply "told"; they are established as children and teachers build and share common understandings about what counts as significant knowledge in schools, how such knowledge is organised and how negotiation proceeds around it. Cazden's notion of concentrated encounters promised the potential to achieve this.

It is in fact enlightening to return to one of the quotations I gave earlier and review the kinds of questions it stimulated.

> "They (concentrated encounters) are <u>condensed forms of familiar interaction experiences.</u> They represent our <u>best examples of teaching encounters</u> and are as close as possible to them in setting, participants and topics. But they are <u>focused by teaching direction</u>...., and involve a smaller than usual group of children so that the participation of each child is maximised." (Cazden, 1977, p. 52, emphasis added)

-How do you <u>condense</u> an interaction experience?

-What was the significance of and what potential existed in the notion of familiar interaction experiences? How could we make experiences familiar? What would be the purpose of this? At first I did not realize the connection, but we soon found ourselves on the pathway to Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development and to Bruner's (1983) associated notion of Scaffolding.

-If concentrated encounters represent the best examples of teaching encounters, what role should/could they play within our teaching programs? To what extent could they form a core around which programming could be organised?

-In teaching, what role would focusing and teaching direction play? What negotiation strategies would a teacher require to focus and direct? In what way did focusing and directing relate to the earlier notion of condensing?

Within our program the term concentrated encounters grew into what could be best described as "text focused lesson sequences" from which children could learn,

1. How language is employed to structure and organize what counts as knowledge in schools and
2. How language is employed to negotiate learning in schools.

1. How language is employed to structure and organize what counts as knowledge in schools.

We needed language goals that were formulated in a manner that could encompass the curriculum goals of the classroom. They also needed to be formulated in a manner that maximised the

teacher's ability to make their cultural purpose clear to the children. We chose Halliday and Hasan's (1985) notion of text to express our language goals because it is at the level of text and the associated notion of context that cultural purpose is most easily accessible to the learner. We also drew heavily on Martin's concept of genre (e.g. Martin 1985) as a means of formulating a synthesis between curriculum goals and language goals. (See Christie, 1991, for an accessible review of these concepts in education.) These concepts provide for consideration of social purpose and allow the use of language resources to be specified both within and above the level of sentence.

Here is an example of the kind of taxonomy from which we worked.

TRANSACTIONAL	FACTUAL	LITERARY
service encounters	Recounts	Recounts
receptionist/patient	Reports	Narrative
doctor/patient	Procedures	Aboriginal stories
shopkeeper/shopper	Explanations	for children
letters	Descriptions	Poetry
meeting agendas	Arguments	Legends
case notes on patients	Discussions	Fables
charts		
various forms		
shopping lists		
office memos		
telephone messages		
radio advertisements		
specimen labels		
rosters, etc.		

We attempted as much as possible to contextualize our language goals within the wider community surrounding the school. For that reason, we mad. as much use as we could of community resources. In a curriculum program focused on "health," for example, we typically drew on resources such as Aboriginal

Congress Health Centre, Alice Springs Hospital, St. John Ambulance Brigade, the visiting School Nurse and Dentist.

Transactional genres.

Transactional texts were typically developed during role play concerned with exploring the roles performed by workers in the health field that we found in these ares, for example, Doctors, Nurses, receptionists, etc. With the children we explored, in detail, the oral transactions and the writing activities of these people and engaged in concentrated encounters in class with those texts as our language goals. These writing activities were then employed in our role play activities. Here are some typical transactional text produced by Grade one children role playing a Doctor's surgery. The first contains patient particulars filled in by the receptionist, and the second shows the doctor's case notes for the same patient.

[insert figures 1 and 2 here]

Note the correct spelling. This is because a list of "useful word cards" was built up over the course of the role play work and pinned to the wall in the reception and surgery sections of the role play area. Note also the use of abbreviation e.g., "A/S" for "Alice Springs" and use of "as above." The teacher taught these during concentrated encounter work as strategies that receptionists use.

Factual genres

Factual texts reflected the manner in which expert knowledge was constructed in the technical field we were exploring. For example, we might focus on the report genre to describe the various roles of staff in a hospital or clinic or to describe the major organs in the body. We might employ the explanation genre to explain how teeth develop decay, how the heart works, or how ear infections damage hearing. Procedural texts may be written to detail steps involved in simple medical procedures like eye testing or dealing with an accident victim. Arguments and discussion might consider the need for healthy diet or topical issues such as whether Aboriginal people should be given treatment in a hospital if they don't have a health card.

Here is a simple report jointly constructed between teacher and children during concentrated encounter work by Grade one children (copied from the original in the teacher's manuscript writing with accompanying photographs):

The Doctor

The doctor calls you into
his surgery and asks you
to sit down.
He reads your form
and then he asks you
what is wrong with you.
He look up your nose
and he looks into your mouth

to see
if your tonsils are red.
If you have earache, or
a sore throat and a bad
cough he looks into your ears
with a special light
that goes into your ear.

Literary genres

Although not all the texts we worked on at any one time derived from the central curriculum focus, we drewaw as much support from the topic area under study as we reasonably could. For a unit on health we would typically work on one or more recounts, for example, about a child's trip to hospital for an operation. We might also role play an accident as the basis for a narrative. Here is a recount text jointly constructed between teacher and children during concentrated encounter work by Grade one children (copied from the three-page original in the teacher's manuscript writing with accompanying photographs):

Sister Coles took Robert
to the doctor's room.
He told Robert to lie
on the bed.
The doctor examined Robert.
He took Robert's pulse.
He put a stethoscope
agsinst his back to listen

to his lungs.
Then he listened to his
heart beating.

It is perhaps useful to mention that while we did place a strong emphasis on developing written text as our final language goals in concentrated encounters, we also set oral goals. Whatever the final form of expression, however, the nature of concentrated encounters ensured that oral texts were the precursors of the written text typically set as the ultimate language goal.

2. How language is employed to negotiate learning in schools.

Within the structure of concentrated encounters there is really a double text focus. The first and most obvious text focus is the specific text that is the product or outcome of a particular lesson sequence. The second and less obvious text <u>focus</u> involves making explicit for the children exactly what constitutes an appropriate curriculum negotiation text from the perspective of the education system.

To achieve success with this second text focus is not as difficult as it might seem. It is not that difficult to encourage Aboriginal children to interact enthusiastically on a social plane. The difficulty usually arises when there is an attempt to shift the focus of the discourse from a social to an educational agenda, as we saw with Raylene.

How do you move the child from a purely social agenda in learning to one that shares the dual educational agenda that is

both social and literacy oriented? Luckily for us, this cultural learning process has been particularly well studied in relation to acquisition of the kinds of literacy understandings that are important for educational success in school (Bruner,1986; Cazden, 1983; Goldfield and Snow, 1984; Heath, 1982; Painter, 1986).

In the early stages of literacy learning, parents engage their children in interactions about books that the children perceive as purely social activities. Parents respond readily to them on this level. However, the parents also possess another agenda concerning what aspects of the book are important to their children as well as particular ways of discussing, exploring and learning from the book. And as they set out to share this agenda with their children, they engage in a particular kind of teaching interaction that Bruner calls "scaffolding". It is through scaffolding that parents in literacy oriented homes make this second agenda explicit and accessible to the child.

Scaffolding has a different focus from the one we usually take when we attempt to promote learning in the classroom. Normally, teaching interaction is centred on the asking of questions. The teacher's agenda in asking these questions is generally implicit. And, if the child does not share that agenda then the child can't answer. Parents, however, when they engage in scaffolding interaction with their children create the kinds of context in which they ensure they are seeking a shared agenda from their children.

To clarify how this happens, we need to review some basic features of scaffolding. An important feature of scaffolding as

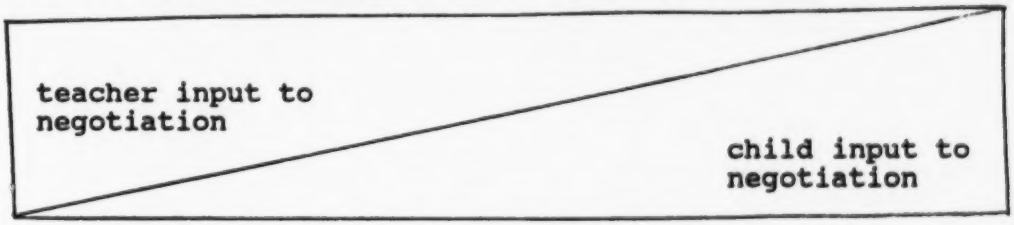
a classroom support strategy for language learning is clearly described by Bruner (1986),

> "In general what the tutor did was what the child could not do. For the rest, she made things such that the child could do with her what he plainly could not do without her. And as the tutoring proceeded, the child took over from her parts of the task that he was not able to do at first but, with mastery became consciously able to do under his own control. And she gladly handed these over." (p. 76, emphasis in the original)

Such a statement means that the process cannot occur apart from a context in which meaning is being jointly constructed by an adult or culturally knowledgeable peer and the child. Furthermore, this quotation highlights other salient features of scaffolding. First, the teacher provides emulative models as he/she enters into the task of jointly constructing the text with the child. Second, the process of providing those emulative models also makes explicit to the child what the adult considers to be important. That is, what counts as significant knowledge in the task. This is necessary for the child to be able to take over and control, rather than simply imitate, performance in the task. Third, as the child gains control of the task, the teacher gradually withdraws support.

Typically, at the beginning of a sequence of concentrated encounter lessons in which there is a focus on the negotiation of a particular kind of text, almost all knowledge of how to construct the target text resides with the teacher. It is the teacher's task over the cycle of lessons to develop the child's autonomous control over the production of the text. The easiest way to do this is to work first with the child to jointly construct the text, and then, as the child's competence

increases, to gradually withdraw the "scaffold" that has been built around the child's performance. This aspect of the process can be represented simply by the following diagram,



----------time ----------
(sequence or cycle of lessons)

When it is isolated out from the rest of the curriculum program, an individual concentrated encounter sequence can frequently appear very simple. For example, one of a number of texts we developed during our work on the health topic was a procedural text about, "How to bandage a cut." As one of the activities within this program, the school nurse visited the class a number of times to demonstrate simple medical procedures to the children. On one of these visits she demonstrated how to treat a serious cut. Prior to her visit the teacher had discussed the activity with her and identified the significant steps in the procedural sequence of the task. When the nurse demonstrated these the teacher made sure she obtained a photograph of each step in this sequence.

Over the next couple of weeks the children and teacher practiced doing this procedure as one of a number of medical procedures they were learning in order to build a suitable repertoire for use in role play work based on the Aboriginal

health centre in the town (i.e., Australian Aboriginal Congress). They did this in small group sessions of short duration that they called "training workshops". At first, the teacher took the role of group leader. She scaffolded the children through the activity and the production of an oral commentary of the procedure. As the children gained competence in these activities, she progressively handed the group leader role over to the children. She encouraged individual children to lead and supported them by taking the lead rolejointly with them when necessary.

The notion of challenging the children to take over the text is important to note. The principle involved is essentially what Bruner (1983) refers to as "upping the ante". As children can do more, so also does the teacher extend his/her expectations for further performance. This approach enables the process to extend far beyond the simple recall of an individual text. Consequently, what is commonly referred to as "rote" learning has no place in the procedure we are discussing.

During this process teachers were conscious of the need to "up the ante" in another way as well. In an activity such as the one we have been discussing, language accompanies action. Such language does not always use the same kinds of language resources that are employed in the creation of written texts or even the kinds of explicit oral texts that are expected in schools. If the final outcome of the concentrated encounter is to be the production of a written text, then the teacher must be concerned to model these kinds of texts and to encourage the children to

take them over. Once the children became familiar with the action sequence we could achieve this, for example, by using photographs or illustrations as the focus of discussion in some sessions or even relying on memory to explain the procedure to a visitor.

Finally, when she considered the children could articulate the procedure sufficiently to enable them to contribute effectively in the negotiation of a written version, the teacher sat with them and jointly constructed a written version of the text with them. Once written, these texts became excellent resources for reading development work as they were already highly predictable to children. This was so even with the very youngest children. Consequently, texts constructed in this manner were made into "Big Books" for group reading and constituted a significant core within our literacy program.

Conclusion

What we achieved at Traeger Park was a fundamental shift in the way we viewed the education of aboriginal children. We managed to shift the focus for the problem away from the individual child. The problem as we found it lay within the dynamics of classroom interaction. Concentrated encounters provided a framework within which we could address that problem.

By employing a social construction approach to classroom discourse which concentrated on the scaffolding of common knowledge, we were able to create the kind of learning environment in which different discourse agendas on the part of

the children and the teacher could come together in a way that still allowed the cultural goals for school learning to be achieved.

In short, the lesson we learned was basically this. Far too often in schools we spend too much time telling Aboriginal children to sit still and watch when we do not show them what to watch. Far too often, we spend too much time telling Aboriginal children to listen when we do not show them what we expect them to listen to. Far too often, we spend too much time telling Aboriginal children to speak when we do not show them what we expect them to speak about. Then we wonder why they can not do these things.

Final Comments

Courtney B. Cazden

In these final comments, I want to report extensions of the idea of concentrated language encounters beyond the young children with whom Gray's curriculum was first developed, and then emphasize the importance of two features of all such activities.

Last summer, while in Australia, I met Gray for the first time, and through him had the chance to visit Traeger Park School in Alice Springs. One of the teachers with whom Gray had worked, Fiona McLaughlin, was last year teaching 7th graders. When I visited her classroom in August, she had just finished what sounded like a marvelous unit on the justice system--with visits

to the court, talks with an Aboriginal woman lawyer, opportunities to speak and write various genres of text, and so forth.

In December, 1991, the Northern Territory government closed Traeger Park. That tragic, and I would say racist, act is a separate story. Important here is that McLaughlin is now working in a literacy program with adult Aboriginal women and children, and adapting concentrated language encounters in her new work (personal communication, Feb. 4, 1992).

Farther afield, another Australian educator and applied linguist, Frances Christie, has been a consultant in adapting the idea for second language teaching in Thailand (Rattanavich & Christie, in press). So there is reason to believe that the curriculum concept that Gray developed in one setting can be usefully adapted for other learners and other kinds of language education: second dialect learning, second register learning, and second language learning.

In all such adaptations, two features of concentrated language encounter curricula go beyond what is more typical in role-playing and language experience activities. One feature is the repeated experienbces that children have, both first hand and via pictures and books, with curriculum content knowledge. In this way, they not only learn that content, but also develop a foundation for speaking and writing with authority. The second feature is the active role of the teacher in scaffolding, modeling, and giving direct instruction--all within the context of these first and second-hand experiences.

With these two features, the kind of curriculum activities that we call concentrated language encounters may help us get beyond some unfortunate dichotomies--process vs. product, social vs. cognitive, immersion vs. instruction, and content vs. language--and thereby achieve more effective communicative competence for our learners.

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Walker. R.F. 1981.

Address 3 Kaegen Street AIS 32

Married yes

Sex male

Date of Birth ~~[illegible]~~5 19-75

Phone No. 526134

Next of Kin

Name John as above

Address as above

Phone No. as above

Relation husband

Special Problems

Figure 1 33

Jelle | le M'eece 33

She has a sore leg

Put menthol on leg and bandage it.

1-9-1983

She has a sore toe.

Last Monday

give her some ointment.

Figure 2